



If you want a faster, more secure and more rewarding PC, you can get it for free with this collection of 20 essential utilities – as chosen by the *Computer Shopper* team

ON THE  
COVER  
DISC

Utilities help to keep your computer running at its best. They protect it from internet nasties, keep your secrets safe, organise your photos, tidy up your hard disk and make Windows run faster. And you don't have to fork out a small fortune to ensure that your PC is running smoothly. Freely available utilities do the same job as commercial products, and in many cases they do it even better.

This month we've brought together the top 20 free utilities that no

computer user should be without. We've put these applications – or links to them – on our cover disc, and don't forget that the DVD edition also includes our Expert Toolkit, with a further 80 tools aimed at power users.

You can find out how to use our top 20 in the walkthroughs in this feature, on your cover disc and in our *Learn* section on page 220, so once you've installed a utility, you'll be able to get started without any headaches.

So read on, and find out how to get your PC into tip-top condition.

## FreeRAM XP Pro

[www.yourwaresolutions.com](http://www.yourwaresolutions.com)

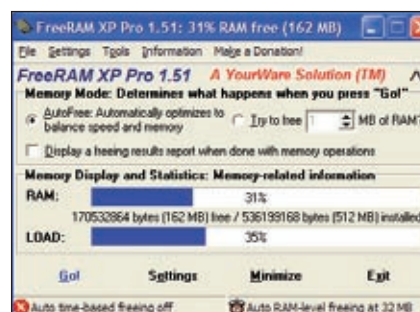
Enthusiasts and power users who tend to run several applications simultaneously will benefit from FreeRAM XP Pro. It is designed to free up a system's physical RAM by moving the memory used by inactive background applications to the Windows swapfile on disk. Many programs hog physical memory they don't need. FreeRAM XP Pro releases this, so the foreground application has more free physical memory to use and doesn't have to rely itself on the slower Windows swapfile, so avoiding that horrible disk grinding.

FreeRAM may sound complicated, but all you have to do is hit the Go! button in the

main window to have FreeRAM analyse your memory and free up as much RAM as possible.

FreeRAM works fine with the default settings, and most people probably won't need to tweak these. By default, it frees up RAM when you specifically ask it to, or when available physical memory drops below 64MB. However, there are also extensive options available in the configuration screen, the most useful of which is the option to free up memory automatically at a specified interval.

To find out how to get started with this utility, read *How To... Make Windows faster* on page 232.



▲ FreeRAM XP Pro gives you at-a-glance information on your PC's memory status



## Grisoft AVG Free Edition

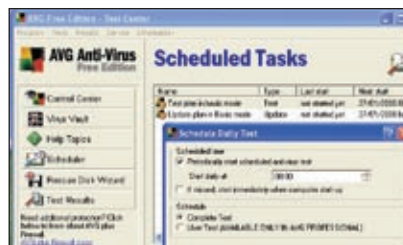
<http://free.grisoft.com>

These days anti-virus software is essential, but buying a good package and subscribing to annual updates can be expensive. The free version of Grisoft's AVG anti-virus software is an effective program that won't slow down your PC. And as long as you use it for personal and not business purposes, it is free.

AVG Free Edition 7 monitors your system for viruses as you work, and can also scan files or your whole hard disk on demand. It checks incoming email, too, and tries to remove any viruses it finds from infected files. When AVG encounters a file that it cannot clean, it locks it away safely in the Virus Vault. You can then delete it or leave it there until a cure is found.

AVG comes with sensible default settings, so once it is installed you can leave it to protect your computer. When you first install it, the software will run the AVG First Run Wizard, which updates the anti-virus database, creates a rescue floppy disk and scans the hard disk. You should follow each step.

For a more detailed look at how to use AVG Free Edition, see page 133.



▲ Scheduling automatic virus scans could not be simpler

## LogMeIn

[www.logmein.com](http://www.logmein.com)

Windows comes with its own utility for accessing your computer from another location. It is called Remote Desktop Access and it can be a useful program. However, many users find it too complicated and fiddly to set up. LogMeIn provides a far easier way.

Once you've installed a little application on the PC you want to access, you can log in from any location, anywhere in the world. It works best if you have broadband access. The free version of LogMeIn provides access only to the Remote Control feature. This brings up a screen within the web browser showing the desktop of the PC you're accessing. You won't be able to drag and drop files from one PC to the other, but you'll have access to your email account and can simply mail files to yourself. If the desktop on the computer you're accessing looks blurry, change the display properties to match the native resolution of the monitor on the computer you're using.

To find out more about how this program works, read *How To... Log in remotely* on the cover disc. We weren't able to include the utility on the cover disc, but you will find a link to a download site there.



▲ Access your computer from anywhere in the world with LogMeIn

## WinRAR

[www.rarlab.com](http://www.rarlab.com)

Compression tools used to be essential extras for all PC users. They take individual or groups of files and squeeze them into archives that take up less space than before.

WinZip was the best example for many years and provided all the functions you needed. Eventually Microsoft integrated Zip-compatible file compression into Windows XP. Since then, file compression has become a little less important. However, with the increased use of file-sharing tools such as BitTorrent (also featured in this article on page 139), highly efficient file compression can reduce download times, letting you use your precious bandwidth more effectively. Many files available for download have been compressed using WinRAR.

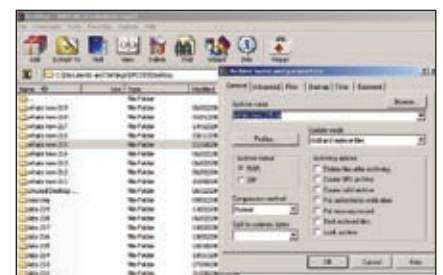
WinRAR is available as a free evaluation download. It supports RAR archives and other common archive file formats such as CAB, ACE, JAR and Zip files. Once you're comfortable with its simple layout and commands, it will easily meet all your file-compression needs. At a basic level, it lets you create new archives from files on your PC, or extract files from an archive previously created or downloaded. There is an easy wizard to help with these basic tasks.

WinRAR is capable of a lot more besides. It can create self-extracting archives, so you can distribute your files to others who don't have WinRAR, and they'll be able to unpack the archives just by double-clicking them. You can also split large archives across multiple files. This is useful for storing large files on backup media, such as CD-R.

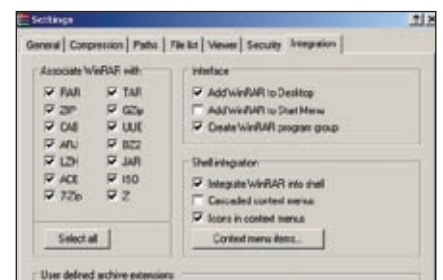
It can also be useful when downloading large files, as one corrupt file segment will not spoil the whole of the download; just download the corrupted segment again and extract the whole archive.

A protect function allows a second smaller file to be created that can repair the main archive should it become damaged. A virus scan command finds scan programs on your machine and lets them scan suspicious archives before you extract them. The program can even be themed with different icons to suit the style of your desktop.

WinRAR is an essential tool for everyday use. Even though physical storage on PCs is now immense, your online bandwidth is still a valuable and limited resource. You'll find WinRAR particularly useful if you plan to use BitTorrent to exchange large files with friends or business colleagues.



▲ WinRAR is an excellent program for compressing and decompressing files, saving on bandwidth and storage space



▲ WinRAR supports all the major file compression formats, as well as having comprehensive options for advanced users





## DivX

www.divx.com

DivX shrinks video files to easily downloadable sizes while preserving the original quality. The DivX website claims that over 200 million people have downloaded the DivX codec and that over 100,000 DivX videos can be found online. These videos range from intriguing independent films made on shoe-string budgets to top-quality, High Definition (HD) Hollywood blockbusters and movie trailers, and they are just waiting to be downloaded.

To play a DivX video you'll need the codec, which is included with the free Play Bundle, currently at version 6.1. With this installed, you can play any DivX movie in the attractive media player included. You may already have



▲ High-quality movies are available online for free and fast download thanks to DivX

a DivX-compatible media player; many new media playing suites and applications have DivX support and will use the Play Bundle codec to give maximum features, quality and file-version support. See [www.divx.com/products](http://www.divx.com/products) for a list of DivX-compatible media playback software.

DivX support is also coming to the consumer market, with more DVD players supporting DivX and its open source alternative, XviD. This offers much the same advantages while not charging for the rights to convert video files; see [www.xvidmovies.com](http://www.xvidmovies.com) for details.

It's the space-saving nature of the DivX compression that makes it so useful, not only for faster downloads but also for saving space on your hard disk. Recordings from Windows XP Media Center 2005 at Best quality take around 25MB per minute. Recordings we made in VOB format for playback on consumer DVD players take up to double the room. Converted to DivX, they'd use up as much as 10 times less space.

## PC Tools Registry Mechanic 5.1

www.pctools.com/registry-mechanic

Windows relies on a central database on your hard disk called the Registry, which stores information on what is installed on your PC. This database determines how everything runs and looks, from Windows itself to applications and drivers. It's a vital part of the Windows operating system; the faster the information held in the Registry can be found, the faster your PC runs.

Many uninstallations leave orphaned entries in your Registry. This bloats the Registry unnecessarily, making search times longer and slowing your PC down. Windows does have a Registry editing tool called RegEdit, which can be launched from the Run command in the Start menu, but Registry Mechanic is much faster, will find more orphaned keys and is far safer.

Registry Mechanic will find every orphaned key that's slowing up your PC. Once found, it fixes the problems automatically as it sees fit. It's remarkably good at knowing how to rectify the problems it finds; fixing your PC is simply a matter of clicking the Fix button. Once we'd cleaned the Registry on our work PC, we found



▲ Clean out the Registry automatically and get a free speed boost

that Windows loaded eight per cent faster. That's an eight per cent performance increase for nothing.

# HOW TO... Stay virus-free with AVG

The well-being of your computer is constantly under attack from viruses that can wipe files or steal data. Matt Chapman shows you how to keep your PC virus-free

If you let a virus run riot on your system, you could lose everything on your hard disk. You could be giving someone a back door to steal your sensitive information or take control of your PC. The best way to prevent virus outbreaks is by installing an anti-virus program. Grisoft's AVG software is free for home use and includes free regular updates to catch the latest viruses.

**1** Open the main AVG window by double-clicking the square icon in the Windows System Tray, next to the clock. It's important that

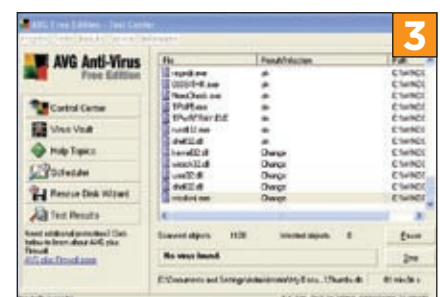
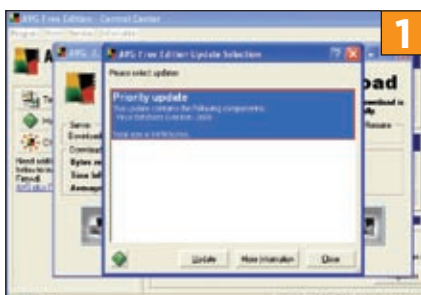
you keep your anti-virus software updated, so on the main window click the Check for Updates button. An update window appears. If there is new information to download, click the Update button. Back in the main AVG window, click the Test Center button.

**2** If you want to scan a specific part of your computer, such as an individual drive or the My Documents folder, click the square button next to Scan Selected Areas. On the following screen, you'll be able to select the areas

to test by clicking a tick box next to the listed items. Click Scan Selected Items to start the test.

If you want to test your whole system, simply click the square button next to Scan Computer.

**3** You can stop the scan temporarily by clicking Pause or cancel it by clicking Stop. If you stop the scan, you can pick it up from the same point at a later stage by clicking Scan Computer, as in Step 2. If AVG finds a virus, it quarantines the file. Follow the instructions in the software to remove it from your computer.



## Audacity

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>

Audacity is a stereo editor rather than an audio or MIDI sequencer, which means it's designed to work with recordings created elsewhere rather than for creating music from scratch. However, there's a range of projects for which it's indispensable.

If you simply want to record audio into your PC, perhaps from a record or MiniDisc player, Audacity handles the task elegantly. Choose which sound card input you've connected the player to from the drop-down list, adjust the input level and hit Record.

Once you're done, you can trim the silence from the start and end of the recording, normalise it to bring the volume up to a sensible level and save it as a .wav file, ready to burn to audio CD. Alternatively, you can save it as an MP3 with the help of the Lame MP3 encoder plug-in available as a separate download, or as an Ogg Vorbis file.

Audacity is also useful for creative tasks. It's perfect for designing samples for use in your audio sequencer, with its precise truncating, splicing and volume curve tools and wide range of corrective and creative



▲ Audacity is a great asset for sound design, perfecting finished mixes and a host of other audio-related tasks

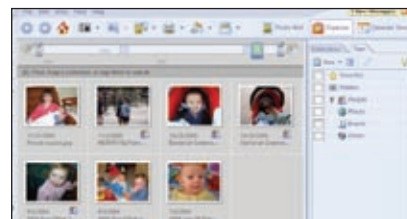
effects. The effects library can be augmented using VST plug-ins, many of which are available for free; [www.smartelectronix.com](http://www.smartelectronix.com) is a great place to start looking.

Audacity also comes in useful for improving finished mixes with additional processing (see *How To... Master music with Audacity* below). You can even use the software to create playlists of tracks that mix seamlessly into one another.

## Adobe Photoshop Album

[www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)

Our hard disks are awash with snaps. Even if you haven't got a digital camera, you can get a photo-processing shop to put your pictures on CD so you can view them on your PC. Finding a particular image can be an overwhelming task. That's where a photo-managing program comes in handy. Photoshop Album is made by the same company that makes the excellent Photoshop and Photoshop Elements, so it knows a thing or two about digital photos. To find out how to get started with it, see *How To... Organise photos* on the cover disc.



▲ Make the most of the photos on your PC with Adobe's easy-to-use Photoshop Album

## HOW TO...

# Master music with Audacity

Make sure the music you create on your PC sounds clear by mastering it correctly using Audacity, as Ben Pitt explains

If you've ever wondered why the music you make on your PC doesn't sound as clear as your CDs, it might be because of all the processing that's applied to professional recordings after they've been mixed, the process known as mastering. A roomful of valve mastering equalisers and compressors is beyond most people's reach, but you can achieve similar results with Audacity.

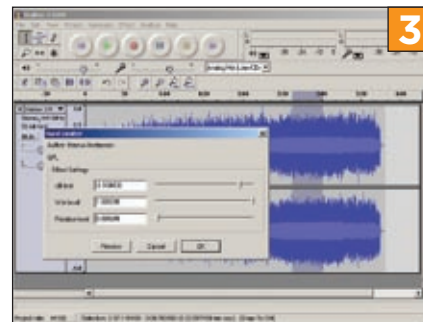
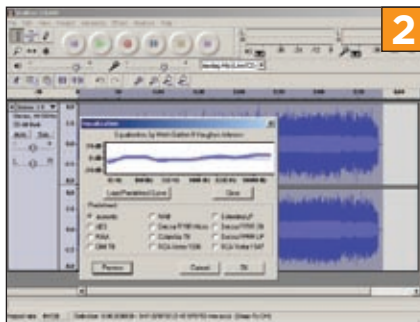
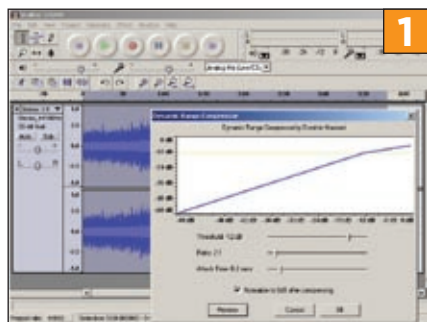
**1** Once you've mixed your track down to a stereo .wav file, launch Audacity, click File, Open and import the file. The first effect we'll use is a compressor, which squashes the dynamic range of the music, making quieter parts louder while keeping the louder parts unchanged. This gives music more punch and means quiet sections don't get lost when played back at low

volumes or in noisy environments. Press Ctrl-A to select the whole track, then click the Effect menu and choose Compressor. The default settings are fine for processing whole mixes, but you can experiment with lower Threshold settings or the higher Ratio for a more pronounced effect. Use the Preview button to test settings, and the OK button when you're happy with them.

**2** You may find it's necessary to apply equalisation, changing the relative volumes of the bass, middle and treble frequencies. You can do this with the Equalisation effect, simply drawing a curve to boost or cut different frequencies. It's easy to overdo this, so compare your mix to a commercial CD that resembles your own music. This will serve as a useful reference, allowing you to check that

you're not just compensating for deficiencies in your speakers.

**3** Use a limiter effect to get as much volume from your mix as possible. It's worth selecting just the loudest part of your track to help find the best settings. Do this by dragging over the waveform to select a section. Open the Hard Limiter from the Effects menu and decrease the dB limit value until the music starts to sound noticeably quieter or distorted. Ease off a little, remember this value and cancel the effect. Then select the whole track with Ctrl-A, open Hard Limiter again and process the track with the setting you noted. Finally, select the Amplify effect, set the New Peak Amplitude to 0dB and apply the effect. You can then save the mastered track by clicking File, Export as Wav.





## ZoneAlarm

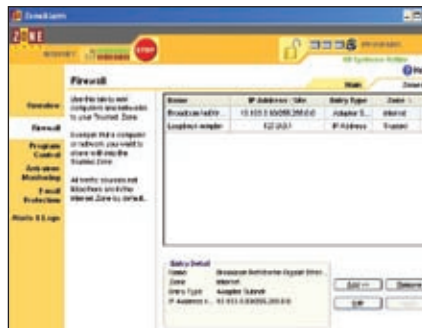
www.zonelabs.com

As soon as you connect to the internet, your computer becomes a tempting target for hackers, viruses, Trojans and a host of other internet nasties. With ZoneAlarm, you can protect your PC and enjoy a safe time online.

The free version of the software provides you with a comprehensive firewall, checking incoming and outgoing traffic and blocking anything suspicious or harmful. ZoneAlarm also monitors applications on your PC. Every time a new program tries to get access to the internet, a pop-up message will warn you and ask if you want to grant it internet access. Windows' own firewall does a similar job, but it doesn't provide the same level of protection as ZoneAlarm.

Firewalls can be complex to configure, but ZoneAlarm is easy to use. When it starts, select ZoneAlarm from the license manager and click Next. The ensuing wizard will configure your PC automatically so your default web browser has access to the internet.

After ZoneAlarm has activated its protection, you'll get a lot of pop-up windows telling you an application is trying to get access to the internet. You can click a button for more information, but if you recognise the program



▲ ZoneAlarm lets just designated programs access the internet, protecting you from viruses, Trojans and spyware that might transmit your private details

click Remember this setting and then Allow. If you don't recognise the application, click Deny. You'll have to do this every time you start an internet application for the first time.

If you want to share files over a local network, you may need to change some of the advanced settings using the control panel accessed by double-clicking ZoneAlarm's System Tray icon. There are excellent help files, and lots of third-party help is available, too.

## TinyURL Toolbar

www.tinyurl.com

The TinyURL toolbar button is one of those tiny little utilities that don't seem to do anything at all. Yet you'll soon find yourself unable to exist without it.

Say you occasionally want to direct friends or colleagues to a web page you're looking at, be it important information for work or an amusing picture of a rollerblading penguin. This should be easy enough; just send them an email with the page's URL. Unfortunately, URLs are often too long to fit comfortably into an email. The TinyURL toolbar button solves this problem by converting even the longest address into a tiny one. After installing the button, just click it while looking at the page you want to send. It'll generate a shorter, neater link ideal for emailing.



▲ A tiny button that does a big job

## HOW TO...

# Monitor your PC using WinPatrol

If there are programs on your computer that you don't recognise or need, then WinPatrol will help you locate them, as Matt Chapman explains

If you are worried about spyware then you should install WinPatrol. As well as preventing new spyware infecting your PC (see page 140), this utility allows you to inspect the software that is already on your computer. Don't be surprised if you are running software you don't recognise. Windows contains many legitimate programs that are hidden from you in day-to-day use.

**1** On the Startup Programs tab, you can see which programs automatically launch when your computer does. Left-clicking an item in the list gives you a number of options. If you press the Disable button, it will be stopped from running and halted every time it is detected in the future. This is a good guard against programs

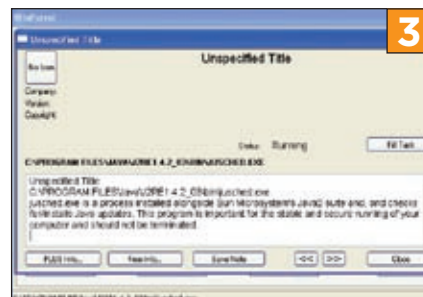
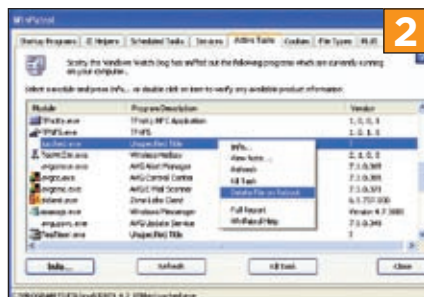
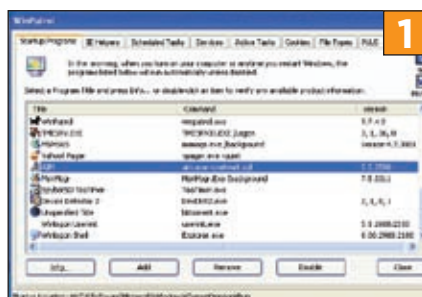
that keep adding themselves back to the Startup menu. You can always restore disabled programs in future by selecting them again and clicking the Enable button. Alternatively, you can use the Remove button to delete an entry completely.

**2** Click the Active Tasks tab to see all the programs currently running. If you don't recognise a process, you can select it in the list and click the Info button to get more details; see Step 3. If you still don't like it, you have several options. Press the Kill Task button to stop it running and remove it from memory. This does not delete the file from your hard disk; it just stops it running in memory.

If you find you still can't get rid of a dangerous program, right-click its name in the

list and choose Delete File on Reboot from the menu. Next time you boot up the PC the file will be deleted before Windows starts, so other programs can't prevent it being deleted. There is no way to recover this file once it is deleted, so be absolutely sure before you use this feature.

**3** When you press the Info button in Step 2, there may not be enough information to decide if it is a legitimate program or not. Feel free to do some snooping of your own using Google or the program list at [www.sysinfo.org/startuplist.php](http://www.sysinfo.org/startuplist.php). If the process turns out to be harmless, leave yourself a reminder that it is OK. Click the Create Note button and type into the white box. Then click the Save Note button followed by the Close button.







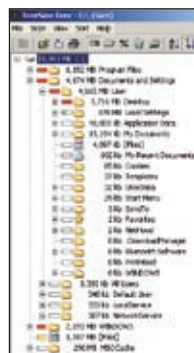
## Treesize Free 1.7.7

[www.jam-software.com/treesize](http://www.jam-software.com/treesize)

Despite the gargantuan size of today's hard disks, it is still easy to find yourself running short of storage space. Sadly, Windows Explorer isn't much help if you need to find out which files are taking up the most room so you can delete them or back them up to reclaim space. TreeSize Free can help, though.

After choosing the hard disk you want to inspect, it displays an Explorer-like view of all the folders and files on the disk. You can choose to see how much space any particular item uses in kilobytes and megabytes, or as a percentage of occupied hard disk space. To call up TreeSize within Windows Explorer, right-click on the file or folder you want to know about and choose the TreeSize option.

You can sort the information alphabetically or by size. Right-clicking on a file or folder in TreeSize allows you to send it to Windows' Recycle Bin. TreeSize Free is free, but the paid-for professional version has more advanced reporting options and its information can be viewed from within Windows Explorer.



▲ Find out what's hogging your space

## Google Desktop Search

<http://desktop.google.com>

If you've been using your PC for a few years, the chances are your hard disk is full of files, and these are probably not very organised either. If you're looking for something, it can often be quicker to use a search engine. It's probably easier to find Robert Dudley's last letter to Elizabeth I, written in 1588, than it is to dig around in My Documents and find a letter to the tax office sent a month ago.

Similarly, anyone who uses email all day will appreciate the sheer volume of messages that can accumulate. In the past correspondence would be carefully filed away for future reference, but today important emails are often left to languish on a hard disk, buried in adverts for Viagra and other spam. Microsoft's Outlook email client has a search function, but when you're searching for an old email this can be a slow and tedious business.

The Google Desktop Search tool solves both these problems. It is very small, so it's quick to download. Once installed, it indexes just about everything on your computer. Office documents, emails, music and video files are all checked and compiled into an index for easy reference. The initial indexing process takes some time, but the software is clever enough to work on the index only when you're not using your computer. Once the initial index is finished, it sits quietly in the



▲ You'll be amazed at what's in your email inbox using Google Desktop Search

background, adding any new files you create.

With the index up to date, finding files and emails is a cinch. You can search your computer from the usual Google web page, where a new Desktop option appears alongside the usual options. You can also install a simple search bar next to the Windows System Tray, or a floating search box that can be placed anywhere on the screen. To locate a letter, for example, you need only type in a few memorable keywords, such as the recipient's name. A search option added to Outlook finds emails far faster than Outlook's own function. Once this utility is installed, you'll wonder how you used your PC without it.

Sadly, we weren't able to include this utility on the cover disc, but we do provide a link to a download site.





## All-in-One SecretMaker 4.2.5

[www.secretmaker.com](http://www.secretmaker.com)

If you're concerned about who might be peeking at your surfing habits, from nosy colleagues and housemates to inquisitive advertisers and spammers, then a utility such as SecretMaker is just what you need.

This multi-purpose utility allows you to block nuisances such as pop-up windows and animated banner advertising. You can set up white lists of websites from which you wish to receive pop-up windows and advertising, such as your online banking service. SecretMaker can also erase your web browsing history and cookies at the end of every browsing session. Care should be taken when erasing cookies since they can be useful as well as invasive; they can, for instance, remember the contents of your shopping basket at Amazon.

SecretMaker works with any browser. Internet Explorer users benefit from a toolbar, which allows them to turn various features on and off as desired. Alternatively, you can use a menu in the Windows System Tray.

If you're worried you might accidentally download adware, spyware, random Internet Explorer toolbars or rogue diallers, don't be; SecretMaker can detect and disable them before you install them. If you've ever been annoyed by websites that change your home page without asking, or random advertising messages popping up in Windows Messenger, SecretMaker can block those, too.



▲ Counter online espionage and protect your passwords with SecretMaker

Most modern email programs have built-in anti-spam filters, but SecretMaker's spam filter is more adaptive than most. It improves its accuracy by learning from what you label as spam. You can even encrypt your emails so only the intended recipient can read them, although this won't work with webmail services such as Gmail.

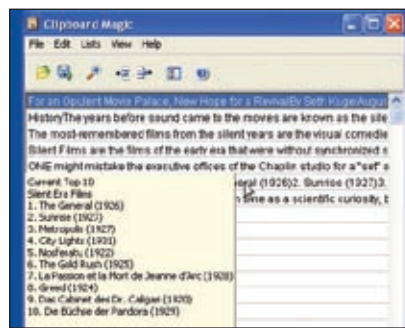
It's no use locking down your PC and being secretive about your web surfing habits if you're going to leave the back door open by choosing an easy password for your online shopping and bank accounts and your PC itself. SecretMaker can help you with this, too, by generating passwords that are more difficult for hackers to guess than your date of birth or the name of your dog.

## Clipboard Magic

[www.cybermatrix.com](http://www.cybermatrix.com)

The cut-and-paste facility is one of the most frequently used functions in Windows. Unfortunately, you are usually restricted to having just one piece of text stored on the clipboard at a time. Clipboard Magic expands this function, enabling you to store as many individual pieces of text as you want. These appear on the Clipboard Magic window in a list. To view a particular piece of text in full, you simply hover your mouse over its entry in the list. You only have to double-click an entry and it can then be pasted into another program or document. Lists of text can also be saved for later use. This is invaluable for anyone doing research online or writing long documents such as reports or essays.

For details on how to use this program, see the tutorial on page 220.



▲ Store as much text as you want with the useful Clipboard Magic

## HOW TO...

# Clean your Registry with Registry Mechanic

Don't let your PC's Registry get cluttered, says Clive Webster. Registry Mechanic can clear out unwanted entries and ensure your system performs at its best

**1** Look at the Options screens before you first run Registry Mechanic. From here, you specify which paths need checking and how thorough the search is. We set up a custom quick search through the more common areas of the Registry for Registry Mechanic to run each time we loaded Windows. Things such as Windows Fonts, Help and Resources and Virtual Devices aren't going to change much. We prefer to save the full scan for a monthly run, as the deep scan can take a couple of minutes.



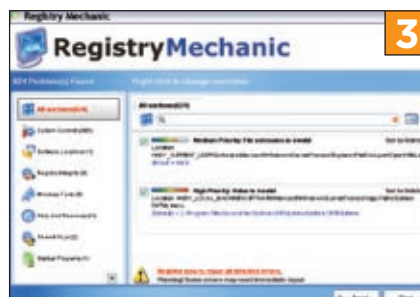
**2** Once the automatic startup scan is set up to your satisfaction, you can save and return to the main screen. It's worth running a full scan as soon as possible, as all sorts of errors can build up in your Registry, resulting in an unresponsive and potentially unstable PC.

The scan takes a few minutes and once completed the results are presented so even a novice can make informed decisions about what should and shouldn't be deleted.



**3** Registry Mechanic is good at knowing what can be deleted from your Registry and what shouldn't. We're happy to let it delete everything it finds without us interfering. However, given the very small possibility that it makes a mistake, it backs up your Registry before changing it. This backup can be restored using the Restore button on the main screen.

Once Registry Mechanic has cleaned your Registry of unnecessary excesses, you'll have a more responsive, more reliable PC.





## Daemon Tools

[www.daemon-tools.cc](http://www.daemon-tools.cc)

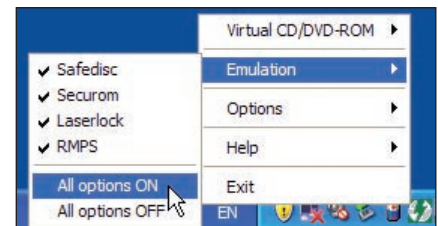
Daemon Tools allows you to clone your copy-protected games on your hard disk and keep the original disc safe. Most games have copy protection of various kinds applied to them and require the original disc to be in the drive.

There are several types of copy protection applied to games; Daemon Tools can cope with SafeDisc, SecuROM, LaserLock and RPMS protection, which accounts for most protection systems. If you're not sure of the scheme for a particular disc, there's a database of titles along with the system used on the website.

Daemon Tools can also maintain virtual DVD or CD-ROM drives on your system. If you have several applications that require the

original media to be in a drive to start up, you can mount complete disc images on up to four virtual drives. You can create the images using an application such as Nero for non-copy-protected discs. Just select the option to copy a CD and choose to write to a disc image file instead of blank media. For locked discs, you need an application capable of making 1:1 or 'sector' copies. These programs clone the entire structure of the disc, coping with the devious copy-protection schemes used by manufacturers, such as overlong discs.

This is a free application, but be careful when installing it as, by default, it also adds a toolbar application across the bottom of your desktop. This will show ads, but you can choose



▲ With Daemon Tools, your CDs can be backed up on your hard disk and then run as if from the original

not to install it. We would have liked to have included a copy of this utility on the cover disc, but we can't for legal reasons. Daemon Tools isn't thwarted by copy protection, so it isn't legal to distribute it. We have been able to include a tutorial that shows you more about using this utility, however; you'll find it in our How To section on page 224.

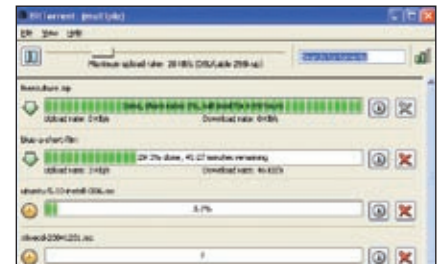
## BitTorrent

[www.bittorrent.com](http://www.bittorrent.com)

BitTorrent has a bad reputation, because it can be used to download illegal copies of films or software. But it has legitimate uses too. Many files are free from copyright. Independent filmmakers may want to distribute a copy of their latest film, or small games developers may want to spread a demo of their title around the net. The main problem with distributing large files from a central server is that bandwidth is expensive. If there is too much traffic, the

server will slow down. BitTorrent gets around this problem by using the combined bandwidth of multiple computers connected to the internet. When you download a file using BitTorrent, you download it from users who already have the file, not from a central server.

To use BitTorrent you need a program called a client that runs on your PC. Use the BitTorrent website to look for files to download, which are represented by other files called Torrents. Torrents tell your client which BitTorrent users have the file you need, and your download begins. For details on using BitTorrent, see page 222.



▲ Once you have found your file on the BitTorrent website, the BitTorrent client manages Torrent uploads and downloads





## SiSoftware Sandra Lite

[www.sisoftware.net](http://www.sisoftware.net)

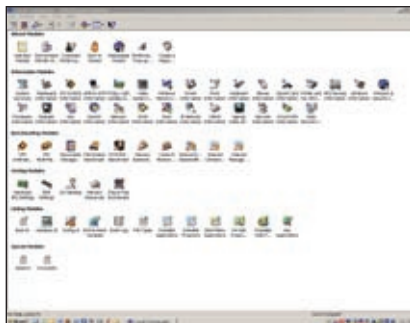
It may sound like a virtual girlfriend, but Sandra – System Analyser, Diagnostic and Reporting Assistant – is a lot more practical. This software allows you to find out a lot of useful details about your PC.

It consists of a number of modules that provide information about subsystems of your PC. For example, the video module gives you information about your graphics chipset, memory, video BIOS and supported resolution. The Windows information module informs you of which version of Windows you're running, its activation status, what updates are installed, and which applications are assigned to essential file formats.

There are also performance benchmarks that quickly ascertain the speed of your PC and let you compare it against a variety of other hardware. These range from CPU arithmetic to memory bandwidth and network tests. It is also possible to upload your benchmark scores for online comparison. The Burn-in Wizard tests system stability by running benchmarks to ensure that your computer is running stably.

Most useful of all is the Performance Tune-up Wizard. This runs a large number of modules and makes recommendations on how you can improve system performance.

Sandra is a very useful and powerful tool. It will prove invaluable when you're troubleshooting a serious problem. Your cover disc includes the latest 2005.SR3 version of Sandra with enhanced chipset support.



▲ Sandra is capable of finding out everything you need to know about your computer

## HijackThis

[www.merijn.org](http://www.merijn.org)

Spyware is a major pain for internet users. This annoying software embeds itself in hard-to-find parts of your PC and interferes with or secretly reports on your internet use, or both. One of the most common types of spyware latches on to your web browser, making the program behave oddly. The spyware's foothold on your PC is often hidden in the Windows Registry and can be hard to find and remove.

HijackThis is a small but effective program that lists the footholds often used by spyware. These include browser helper objects (BHOs), as well as ActiveX Objects, Services and Internet Explorer options that you can't get to in the usual Windows Control Panel.

When you run the program it will present you with a long list of such items. Don't panic and delete all these. Many are for legitimate software, such as Norton Internet Security and Google Toolbar. Tick the ones you want to lose then click the Fix Checked button.

Sometimes the items to remove will be obvious, but usually you will need assistance. There are plenty of help forums on the web manned by experts willing to give you a hand. Click the Save log button to create a text file of settings found by HijackThis, copy its contents to the clipboard and paste this in a message to one of the forums at [www.spywareinfo.com/~merijn/forums.html](http://www.spywareinfo.com/~merijn/forums.html).

To learn how to do this yourself, go to <http://tinyurl.com/9d7xu>. You can also search for files in the list at [www.processlibrary.com](http://www.processlibrary.com). This will indicate whether the file is harmful.



▲ HijackThis lists the Windows weak points often used by spyware programs

## Yahoo! Toolbar

[www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)

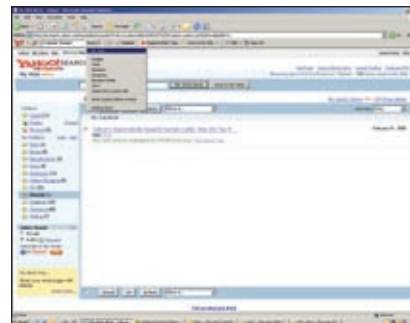
Search engines are essential for navigating the web, but Yahoo! Toolbar helps you go one better. Once installed, it provides a set of configurable buttons that help you quickly find websites, images, news and sport. It's always there at the top of your browser window, so you no longer need to visit Yahoo!'s website each time you want to find something.

You can make more advanced queries by dropping down the Search Options list. You can opt for matching pictures or video, find prices on Kelkoo, look for relevant news and get a stock value from Yahoo! Finance. Yahoo!'s partnership with FIFA means football fans can even add a link button for quick news on their World Cup team's progress.

Modern browsers manage to block most pop-up ads. However, the toolbar's pop-up blocker provides a useful second line of defence. The standard version comes with an anti-spyware utility, which can detect and remove various system nasties, while the My Web button lets you save copies of a website for retrieval at a later date.

Yahoo isn't the first search engine to offer a toolbar; Google's has been available for longer. But Yahoo! Toolbar offers a wider range of services. With a Yahoo! login, you can install the toolbar on multiple computers and your settings will be applied to each PC's browser. Users of Yahoo!'s mail or calendar services can configure one-click buttons to log them straight into the relevant page.

We couldn't include this utility on the cover disc, but there's a link to a download site.



▲ With Yahoo! Toolbar it's easy to make the most of the features in Yahoo!

## WinPatrol

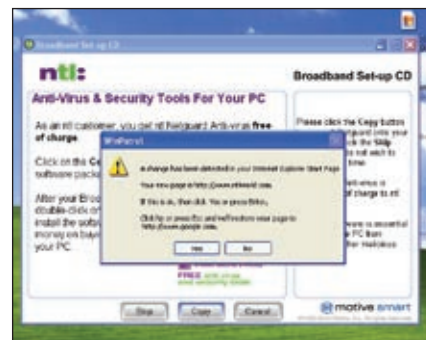
[www.winpatrol.com](http://www.winpatrol.com)

Working on the principle that prevention is better than cure, WinPatrol protects your computer from adware, spyware and other malicious software. Even cautious computer users eventually expose themselves to infection, but WinPatrol protects the areas of your PC where malware can get a foothold.

It alerts you if there's any change to the programs that auto-start when you boot your PC, or if there are any new Windows services or browser helper objects. If something new appears, you are told its name and can decide to allow the change or not. The free version of WinPatrol can't tell if a program is suspicious, but unexpected changes should ring alarm

bells. The Startup Applications List at [www.sysinfo.org/startuplist.php](http://www.sysinfo.org/startuplist.php) can help identify mystery programs. A \$25 (£14) registration adds an up-to-date program database to WinPatrol. WinPatrol can also stop active tasks on your PC, killing groups simultaneously if necessary. A Disable button automatically stamps on malware that keeps coming back.

If you're worried about spyware, WinPatrol is an effective precaution that you can simply install and forget; see *How To... Monitor your PC using WinPatrol* on page 136. But if spyware has already taken hold of your PC, also try the free Ad-Aware Personal from [www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware](http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware). **CS**



▲ If a new startup program or page is installed on your PC, WinPatrol alerts you